

Serpent Crest part three - Aladdin Time, by Paul Magrs

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(The Story So Far - excerpts from the previous story.)

STORYTELLER: Oh great and merciful King, whose bountiful wisdom knows no end, whose majesty exceeds that of the most excellent wonders of this marvellous world, please, before our servants come to turn out the lights and you slip into your magnificent dreams, before the dawn arrives all too soon in its gaudy finery, and with it the order for my execution, will you listen to my story? It is a strange and exotic tale. It transpired that a long way from here, and a long time ago, or then again, perhaps it hasn't even happened yet. I am merely the story's handmaid, and I know that it is longing to be told. Perhaps, if my humble tale pleases you, O great and marvellous King of all these lands, perhaps then you will show mercy to your poor young wife and allow her to continue her useless existence in your wondrous realm. It is said that you never keep your new wives longer than a single night and day, but perhaps, oh, perhaps, I can persuade you to spare me, at least until my tale is told. It begins here, in an underground cavern with a glittering treasure trove in which the most perfect jewels and artefacts twinkle in the pale light of everlasting candles. Such bounty was placed for safe keeping some hundreds of years ago, by a band of ruthless robbers. The cavern lies beneath a desert, forgotten by almost everyone. All, that is, but for one wicked Magician who has poured over the old maps and charts for weeks and months, and now at last has tracked down this hidden horde of treasure. But the way into the caverns is perilous. Try as he might, the Magician cannot squeeze himself into the cavern's mouth without bringing danger upon himself, and ruining his fine robes. So, to this end, he has stolen a boy, an insignificant urchin from the nearest shanty town on the outskirts of Aleppo, and he has brought him into the burning desert, across hundreds of leagues, and now he has set him to work. This Aladdin, for such is the boy's name, had been commanded to wriggle his way into the cave mouth and descend into the netherworld that those wicked robbers created for themselves so many years ago. Fearing what the Magician would do to him and his poor mother if he failed to comply, the boy Aladdin has done as he was told. Terrified, he clammers down the greasy rope with his heart in his mouth, not knowing what he might encounter in that subterranean gloom. He has heard the tales of curses that are placed over caves such as this. From the storytellers at home he has heard blood-curdling tales of heroes being trapped in tombs with flesh-eating ghouls and vengeful afreets. Anyone daring or foolish enough to set foot in such hallowed places will be doomed forever. Now, reaching the bottom, he has found that the chambers contain the wondrous stuff of infinite wealth, just as the Magician had hoped, and the vast rooms beneath the blistering desert go on and on, one doorway leading astonishingly to the next. So Aladdin wanders, incredulously, deeper and deeper into the golden labyrinth, until he has come so far that the Magician's voice has long faded away behind him, and now, suddenly, he hears other noises. The voices of other people down here.

ALADDIN: Hello?

STORYTELLER: Now terrified, Aladdin listens keenly for a reply. He is certain there were voices up ahead, in the very next chamber. However impossible it should be, it would appear that other robbers are here, this very night, revelling in the fortune which they thought they alone had uncovered.

ALADDIN: They'll kill me, thieves like that. They're always merciless. They'll think nothing of doing away with me.

STORYTELLER: But something draws him onwards, into that chamber, wherein he finds a white-hot glow, for the strangers, two of them, have a magical kind of torch, and it's illumination

is much brighter than candle light. Behind its beam he sees them, a strangely-dressed man and a stern looking woman, turning to face him in that most opulent of rooms.

DOCTOR: Look, Mrs Wibbsey. A young boy.

WIBBSEY: That's funny. There wasn't even a door there a moment ago. Oh, thank goodness for that air coming in.

DOCTOR: Hello, ragamuffin. Who are you?

ALADDIN: I'm Aladdin, sir.

DOCTOR: Ah. Do you know, I rather thought you might be.

WIBBSEY: You mean, like in the pantomime?

DOCTOR: I doubt he knows what a pantomime is, Mrs Wibbsey. Perhaps more like the old tale, eh?

WIBBSEY: Well, what's he doing here?

DOCTOR: He might ask us the very same thing. One minute Hexford in 1861, then next, transported into this weird domain. We have a lot of discovering to do before this day is out.

ALADDIN: Night, sir.

DOCTOR: Hmm?

ALADDIN: It's night time outside. I was put down here under the cover of darkness. You won't harm me, will you?

WIBBSEY: What?

DOCTOR: Why, of course not. Why would we do that?

ALADDIN: Why, you must both be mighty spirits, afreets, to live down here sealed into these caves. Are you the Keepers of the Treasure? Will you place a curse on me for disturbing your rest?

WIBBSEY: Oh, the poor boy's terrified.

DOCTOR: Look, it's nothing like that. We don't belong in these caves either. We just appeared here at the end of a very peculiar journey.

WIBBSEY: Par for the course with us.

ALADDIN: You are people, then? Not spirits, not demons?

WIBBSEY: I can only speak for myself, but yes, I'm utterly normal. But what are you doing here, Aladdin?

DOCTOR: Oh, come on, Mrs Wibbsey. Don't you remember the story?

WIBBSEY: Shh. I want to hear it from him.

STORYTELLER: And so, a little nervously, the boy starts to tell his tale to these strangers. How he and his poor widowed mother were hoodwinked by the Magician who claimed to have travelled from a distant land. He told them he was a cousin of the boy's dead father, come to claim Aladdin as his own.

ALADDIN: Mother thought I'd be learning a trade. She said that if I was apprenticed to a Magician, the world would be at my feet. But the Magician merely wanted me as a slave. We rode out into the middle of the desert until we came to the oasis and the tiny hidden tunnel that leads down here. My only qualification for being his apprentice turns out to be that I'm disposable and small.

STORYTELLER: As the boy talks, the woman called Mrs Wibbsey watches him carefully, moved by his plight. She says nothing.

DOCTOR: So what is it he wants from down here, eh, this Magician of yours?

ALADDIN: He wants the treasure, sir.

WIBBSEY: All of it? It would take you forever to carry this lot up to the surface.

ALADDIN: There is one particular item he prizes above all others.

DOCTOR: Ah, and what would that be, eh? As if we didn't guess, eh, Wibbs?

ALADDIN: You're laughing at me, sir. Why would you do that?

WIBBSEY: Don't mind him, it's just his way. Doctor, just let him tell his story.

DOCTOR: It's a lamp, isn't it? He sent you here to fetch a lamp, hmm?

ALADDIN: But how could you possibly know that?

DOCTOR: Aladdin, everybody knows that.

ALADDIN: You *are* spirits. Both of you. I was right.

DOCTOR: Rubbish. It's just that I know the story, you see. I read the Arabian Nights when I was a Time Tot.

ALADDIN: Explain yourself, spirit!

DOCTOR: Well, if you must know, this whole place is a hyper-reality. It's a fiction projected by an alien intelligence into a fifth-dimensional environment. Hmm? Mrs Wibbsey and I arrived here by accident after an encounter with a Skishtari Gene Egg. Now that we're caught up in it, this labyrinth of tunnels and caverns is as real and as solid as anything else. Does that make sense to you, Aladdin?

(Something mechanical clicks and beeps below the dialogue.)

WIBBSEY: So how do we get out of it? Can we get out of it?

DOCTOR: Oh, Wibbsey, where there's a will there's a way. Science and rationality will see us out of this problem as ever. Presumably the whole edifice is being ruled over by the Skishtari embryo inside the Egg. Somewhere there must be a power source. The question is, will it be mechanical or organic or neither. Whichever way, even something as sophisticated as a Skishtari brain must have an Orff switch.

WIBBSEY: Orff?

DOCTOR: Yes.

ALADDIN: What are you doing?

DOCTOR: I'm tinkering. This device works a bit like an electronic radar. Think of it as a sort of magic wand. Ah. Just as I thought. A centre of magnetic radiation, quite distant but present nevertheless. There's something emitting energy here in these tunnels, and we need to find it.

WIBBSEY: And what will you do with it if we do?

DOCTOR: Mrs Wibbsey, it's our only hope of getting out of here. Aladdin, will you help us?

ALADDIN: Sir, I'm looking for the Magician's lamp, and he won't let me out until I find it. But I suppose we could join forces in our quests.

WIBBSEY: Good boy!

STORYTELLER: But what a convoluted and confusing place those tunnels and caves are, your Majesty. The treasure-seekers have already seen that doors can appear and disappear at will. Where once there was a sealed room, now there are several corridors branching off into the distance, each one encrusted with jewels glittering in the candle light.

WIBBSEY: All this treasure stuff. Make you feel a bit sickly after a while, doesn't it?

ALADDIN: Not me. I wish I could fill my pockets and take some of this back home to my mother. She'd never have to scrub and clean for richer people then.

WIBBSEY: Oh, in service, is she?

ALADDIN: She works her fingers to the bone every day.

DOCTOR: So does Mrs Wibbsey here, when she's at home. Marvellous housekeeper, she is.

WIBBSEY: Yes. But life's been a bit hectic recently. I shall be quite glad to get back to some dusting.

DOCTOR: Oh, we're definitely onto something.

STORYTELLER: But the vibrations from the Doctor's dainty tool have caused the atmosphere of those caves to tremble. The air quivers. The mountains of golden coins all around them shiver. The place has remained undisturbed for many centuries, but now, as they creep through a canyon of sheer gold, the huge fortune rumbles around them.

WIBBSEY: What's that?

DOCTOR: I may have miscalculated.

ALADDIN: It sounds like thunder coming.

DOCTOR: It isn't thunder. The bounce-back from my magnetic detector has unsettled all this booty. It's what you might call an economic downturn, otherwise known as an avalanche. Quickly, run!

WIBBSEY: How the devil can it be an avalanche?

DOCTOR: Of gold! Run, Wibbsey, run!

WIBBSEY: Aladdin, take my hand.

ALADDIN: I can't reach.

DOCTOR: Oh, what a fool am I. I should have realised that using the magnetic detector on such a high frequency would set this off.

(Mrs Wibbsey screams.)

ALADDIN: Doctor!

DOCTOR: Wibbsey! Wibbsey, no!

(Clatter of falling coins fades out.)

STORYTELLER: And then, for as far as the eye could see, all that can be discerned is a ravishing cascade of golden coins. Where once the housekeeper had stood, there is now a rushing torrent of gold. The Doctor and the boy can only stand and stare. Mrs Wibbsey is buried alive under a Sultan's ransom. And so, O marvellous and merciful King, we must leave the tale there for this evening. The chill steals in from outside and our lamps are dimmed. The time for stories is finished for now. What's that? You would hear more? Surely not tonight. Your poor young wife is tired. Perhaps you can wait, O great one. Spare my humble life and I will tell you more tomorrow.

DOCTOR: Oh dear Wibbsey, what have I done?

ALADDIN: Was she your favourite housekeeper, Doctor sir?

DOCTOR: She was my only housekeeper, lad. How could I want for any other when I had a magnificent Wibbs? And now she's been crushed by a million gold ducats in a cave inside a dream, inside a magical Egg.

STORYTELLER: Your Majesty has shown great wisdom and compassion in saving my life for one more day. As I regale you further with these tales, I shall make sure you shall not regret it. As we have seen, the Doctor believes his friend to be no more. But then, suddenly, she bursts all alive from within that sea of gold.

WIBBSEY: Oh, oh! It's all right, I'm here. Phew, I'm out.

DOCTOR: Oh, Wibbsey!

ALADDIN: Mrs Wibbsey.

WIBBSEY: I held my breath. I never told you I was a breast stroke champion, did I?

DOCTOR: Mrs Wibbsey, I believe you could do anything.

WIBBSEY: I do my best.

DOCTOR: Interesting, though. Sudden unexpected dangers like that, almost like a literal cliff-hanger, the kind you have to find a way out of, just the sort of thing for keeping us on our toes, almost as if we were part of somebody's story.

WIBBSEY: What?

DOCTOR: Every get the feeling that someone is narrating you?

STORYTELLER: Our heroes continue with their exploration of the caverns and tunnels, descending ever deeper into this curious world. The Doctor leads the way as they progress through the most bizarre realms of treasure.

WIBBSEY: Urgh, it's a room full of hair!

DOCTOR: Furs and pelts from the most fabulous beasts in the universe.

ALADDIN: Incredible!

WIBBSEY: It's barbaric.

ALADDIN: Look, madam, fur from the fabled Golden Bears of Hyspero.

DOCTOR: What's that? Hyspero? No. What does a ragamuffin like you know about Hyspero?

ALADDIN: I, I don't know, sir. It just came into my head.

DOCTOR: Yes, I dare say it did.

WIBBSEY: Doctor, don't you think we should tell him who he really is?

DOCTOR: Hmm?

WIBBSEY: Well, it's Andrew, isn't it? The Rector's boy. He looks different but his voice is so familiar.

DOCTOR: Shh. If I were you I wouldn't tell him anything of the sort. He clearly has no idea.

ALADDIN: What are you talking about?

DOCTOR: Oh, Mrs Wibbsey and I were just talking about Hyspero. Oh, wonderful planet on

the brink of the cosmos. Bazaars and souks to die for. I once bought a wonderful Wellington boot there, and a parrot called er, Nelson.

STORYTELLER: And so they move on, into the chamber beyond.

(Heavy rain, thunder.)

WIBBSEY: Oh! I wish I'd brought my brolly.

DOCTOR: Yes. This appears to be a room filled with storm clouds.

ALADDIN: Precious indeed to a desert dweller.

DOCTOR: Of course. Ha! Well imagined, lad.

STORYTELLER: In chamber after chamber they discover all manner of delights. Armies of statues in peculiar poses, a forest of trees whose fruits are one-way tickets to the most fabulous destinations, and even an empty room peopled by disembodied voices.

DOCTOR: Ah, the chatter of adults in far-off rooms.

ALADDIN: I can't make out what they're saying.

WIBBSEY: Gives me the creeps.

DOCTOR: All the secrets in the universe being told at once. Can't you hear?

STORYTELLER: But there is no time to stay and eavesdrop on even the most tempting of secrets. The Doctor and his friends must always move on, until at last they are glad to return to a room of simpler treasures. A chamber lined with silk curtains and perfumed with incense, and tables laden with frozen goblets, and a vast array of ornate clocks made from silver and gold and dandelions.

WIBBSEY: (yawns) All of that ticking is making me feel drowsy.

ALADDIN: Can't we rest, Doctor sir? My feet are sore, and Mrs Wibbsey looks worn out.

DOCTOR: Oh, well, I'd sooner push on, but I can see you are both exhausted.

WIBBSEY: Only human, Doctor.

ALADDIN: There are silk cushions here, madam. Allow me to make a bed for you.

WIBBSEY: Oh. Oh, that's very kind of you. What about you?

ALADDIN: I'll manage. There, lie down and sleep.

WIBBSEY: I must admit, I have come over a bit tired.

DOCTOR: You're a good boy, Aladdin. Here, have my scarf. Bundle it up into a pillow and sleep beside her.

(Mrs Wibbsey snores gently.)

ALADDIN: (yawns) Thank you, sir. I fear our journey has fatigued us more than we realise. Goodnight, sir.

DOCTOR: Yes, goodnight. Sleep tight. Hope the Drashigs don't (falls asleep.)

STORYTELLER: What strange atmosphere has been fomenting in that chamber for all those years? What sleeping draught within those goblets and seeps through the air in the incense fumes? Whatever the cause, within moments they are all in the arms of Morpheus, sleeping soundly. Even the Doctor succumbs, dreaming of tortoises. The golden clocks tick as hours pass, and aside from the softly breathing trio, there is no other noise, no other movement apart from the rising and falling of their breasts. But, O marvellous King, you are beginning to suspect that something terrible is about to happen, aren't you, while they lie vulnerably supine. And indeed it is.

ALADDIN: (dreaming) No, you can't have it. You mustn't take it. I'll send you all away.

STORYTELLER: Aladdin twists and moans in his sleep. Words are wrung from his chest, their meaning pertaining to his previous life perhaps, or even the one before that.

ALADDIN: (dreaming) We're all prisoners here, Mister Bewley. Who are these people? Mother, where?

STORYTELLER: Sleeping so restlessly, he is soon entangled in his make-shift pillow so that one might even think that the multi-coloured coils are moving of their own accord, and magically coming to life. Yet the boy does not wake. His dreams become quieter and his murmurs fade away as he falls more deeply asleep. But the Scarf has its own ideas. It rears a tasselled head, looking quite malign in the golden light, as if frowning at them all, and most especially at the Doctor. This woollen serpent gathers its endless coils together from under the sleeping boy and slithers its way around the party, as if it means them harm. And then, all of a sudden, it turns and glides into the shadows, yard after yard of colourful snake vanishing until it's all gone.

ALADDIN: (dreaming) No. No! Mother!

WIBBSEY: (wakes) Oh. Aladdin? Oh, are you all right?

ALADDIN: Mrs Wibbsey, I'm sorry for waking you.

(The Doctor snorts himself awake.)

DOCTOR: What is it? Oh, I must have been asleep. That's very unlike me.

ALADDIN: Doctor sir, I've been having the most terrible dreams.

WIBBSEY: It's not surprising, being shut down here in this weird place. You were calling for your mother.

ALADDIN: It wasn't just that. I saw silver ships in the blackness of the night. They were shooting great spears of light at each other, and exploding into flames and smoke. I saw people dying all around me.

DOCTOR: That's intensely interesting.

ALADDIN: Does it *mean* something, sir?

DOCTOR: Mmm. Only that your current identity is breaking down.

ALADDIN: Pardon?

WIBBSEY: Don't frighten the lad. Take no notice of him, Aladdin. A dream's a dream. Just that. Goodness knows I've had enough of them in my time.

DOCTOR: Yes, we'd better press on. Aladdin, where's my scarf?

ALADDIN: It, it's gone.

DOCTOR: What? It can't have gone. Have you hidden it somewhere?

ALADDIN: No, sir. I promise.

WIBBSEY: Someone's made off with it while we were asleep.

STORYTELLER: Disturbed by the inexplicable loss of his apparel, the Doctor leads them on their way, his detecting instrument still attuned to the vibrations in the air.

DOCTOR: The back of my neck is chilly.

WIBBSEY: Oh, I'll knit you a new one.

STORYTELLER: Trying to ignore the sudden sense of awful dread which has crept upon them, our heroes push on into the caverns. They are just easing their way through a room containing priceless scrolls and rolled-up treasure maps when

ALADDIN: Doctor, Mrs Wibbsey, can you hear something up ahead?

DOCTOR: I'm not sure. Is that you, Mrs Wibbsey?

WIBBSEY: Of course it isn't. No, there's some kind of creature through there.

STORYTELLER: The next room is crammed with opalescent glass baubles, and presided over by a fearsome looking beast.

DOCTOR: You were right, Wibbs.

ALADDIN: It's a Gryphon.

WIBBSEY: Just like Alice in Wonderland.

STORYTELLER: The creature's leonine body lies sprawled before them, blocking the way. Your Majesty, it was the very picture of laconic grace, picking at its toenails with a gilded beak.

DOCTOR: Gryphons are most particular about their ablutions. Good morning, your Grace. Will you let us pass?

GRYPHON: Why should I put up with it? That's what I'd like to know.

ALADDIN: Put up with what, sir?

GRYPHON: The likes of you lot running about in here, exclaiming over everything and getting all worked up.

WIBBSEY: We're sorry if we've disturbed your rest.

ALADDIN: Sir.

WIBBSEY: Oh yes, er, sir.

GRYPHON: It's all very well apologising after the event, but you've gone and woken me now. I'm not a morning person.

DOCTOR: Ahem. We're on a rather important mission, your Grace. You see, we're looking for something.

GRYPHON: I've heard it all before. There's always someone looking for something. Don't go thinking you're doing anything novel.

DOCTOR: Look, old cock, we really haven't got time for this.

WIBBSEY: Don't aggravate him, Doctor. He can probably breathe fire or something.

ALADDIN: Is there a riddle or something, sir, that you'd like to test us with? Isn't that usually what happens in stories?

WIBBSEY: Ooo yes, very good, Aladdin.

GRYPHON: Bah. Riddles don't interest me. You should learn to be less fanciful, boy. Pay proper heed to your scriptures, I say.

DOCTOR: Hang on. Does he sound familiar to you?

ALADDIN: I don't think so.

DOCTOR: Mrs Wibbsey?

WIBBSEY: Now that you come to mention it.

GRYPHON: I'm not here to ask you riddles nor to stand in your way. But I am here to help you, and to give you a warning.

DOCTOR: You know, I'm sure it's him.

WIBBSEY: Yes, what is it? I'm listening even if the Doctor isn't.

GRYPHON: The Magician is coming after you.

ALADDIN: But he couldn't. He wouldn't dare endanger himself. And the entrance into the cave was too small. That's why he sent me.

GRYPHON: Well, now he has become so impatient waiting for you that he's decided to actually brave the dangers himself. He's found a way to squeeze into these opulent catacombs, and he knows that you've teamed up with these strangers. He's very angry, Aladdin. He thinks you will betray him, give the magic lamp to these two.

ALADDIN: But how can he see what's going on here?

WIBBSEY: Good question. How can the Magician know what's been going on down here?

DOCTOR: I've a nasty suspicion that the usual rules of narrative are being tampered with. We seem to have an unreliable narrator at work. Goodness knows what they're telling everyone.

ALADDIN: I'm scared. I don't understand.

DOCTOR: Oh, don't worry, ragamuffin, we'll protect you.

WIBBSEY: This Magician fellow won't hurt you while we're here.

GRYPHON: Don't be too sure, Mrs Wibbsey. The Magician's mind is damaged.

DOCTOR: Oh?

GRYPHON: Long ago he took a tumble of such calamity that his brains became addled.

DOCTOR: And er, where is he now, your Grace?

GRYPHON: I'm afraid that's as much help as I can be.

ALADDIN: He's fading away.

DOCTOR: That's not a great deal of help, actually.

GRYPHON: You'll find what you seek if you stick to the path.

WIBBSEY: Well, we don't seem to have a lot of choice. We can't go backwards if this Magician is following us.

ALADDIN: He's going to be so angry with me.

DOCTOR: Well, at least Captain Beaky's gone. I'm always uncomfortable in the presence of mythical creatures. Did I ever tell you about a nasty run-in I once had with a Minotaur? Quite amazing.

STORYTELLER: In this way, the Doctor distracts his companions from their fears, and so their quest continues. But soon they find themselves at an intersection, faced with numerous branching corridors and a single choice to be made. The Doctor tunes his mystical wand like a diviner's rod, its delicate sensors advising them of the way to go. But the passage they take is perilous, and they find themselves negotiating ledges and crevasses that seem to penetrate deep into the dark world's core.

WIBBSEY: Oh, this reminds me of that Sepulchre place.

DOCTOR: This has got nothing to do with that. Keep flat against the rock wall and don't look down. One step at a time.

ALADDIN: It's all right, Mrs Wibbsey. You'll be all right. I'm nervous of heights as well.

STORYTELLER: But Mrs Wibbsey's seem nimbler and more sure-footed than she is. She inches along the tiny ledge, darting glances into the dark, aware that at any moment she could drop, screaming mindlessly, into the abyss.

WIBBSEY: Must keep a grip on myself.

DOCTOR: Are you still bringing up the rear, Wibbs?

WIBBSEY: I, I'm still here.

DOCTOR: Good, good.

(Mrs Wibbsey is whimpering under the dialogue.)

DOCTOR: It gets a bit more slippery here. The rock walls are all solid gold. Top carat, too. Be extra careful.

STORYTELLER: The Doctor speaks too boldly, for at that very moment it is *his* boots which lose their purchase, and it is *he* who abruptly slips into the void.

(The Doctor's scream fades slowly into the distance.)

WIBBSEY: Doctor!

ALADDIN: Sir!

STORYTELLER: As his cries fade, an awful silence rings out. In an instant his friends have lost him.

WIBBSEY: Oh, no. Oh, no.

ALADDIN: Mrs Wibbsey, do not give up. I'm still here. You must continue.

WIBBSEY: What are we going to do without him? Oh, no!

STORYTELLER: She is frozen to the spot, her limbs locked as if she might cling to that golden cliff face forever.

ALADDIN: Please, madam, take my hand. I will help you.

WIBBSEY: All right.

STORYTELLER: The woman reaches into the darkness and feels the child's warm hand clasp her own.

ALADDIN: We can get out of here alive.

WIBBSEY: None of that will be any use without the Doctor.

ALADDIN: We will remember him always.

STORYTELLER: If the Doctor could have heard that simple, earnest tribute from the brave child, how touched he would have been. But at that present moment, he has no inclination to consider the fittingness of eulogies, since he is literally clinging on for dear life. Ah yes, O great and wondrous King, for the time being he has survived. And there, your Majesty, we must end this evening's entertainment. Once again the hours of night call time on my story. Our hero holds on desperately by his fingernails to a crack in the sheer cliff wall several hundred feet

below his grieving friends. There he hangs, still alive, but in heinous danger. If you spare me for long enough, I will tell you tomorrow what becomes of him next.

DOCTOR: Hello? Can anybody hear me? I'm still alive, you know. Mrs Wibbsey? Aladdin? Now, what did Dame Nellie Melba teach me about voice projection? Everything she knew, that marvellous woman. An absolute peach. (very loud) Hello! (normal) Who's there?

(Hiss!)

DOCTOR: I can hear you but I can't see you.

SCARF: I'm here, my dearest Doctor, right before your eyes.

DOCTOR: Oh, I see. Let me find my torch, then.

(Deep chuckle.)

DOCTOR: As you'll appreciate, it's quite a feat when I'm clinging on for dear life. Luckily I'm as supple as I am tenacious. Ah, there we are. You?

SCARF: Yes. Of course it's me. Who else could get down here so elegantly, so easily?

DOCTOR: But, but it can't be you.

SCARF: Do you not believe the evidence of your own mad staring eyes?

DOCTOR: Oh, it's terribly nice to see you again. old thing, but you really shouldn't be chatting away to me like this. After all, you're my scarf.

STORYTELLER: Ah, your Majesty, we are gathered once more, on another balmy evening, to listen again to the tales of adventure beneath the desert, in those amazing tunnels with the Doctor and. What's that, your Majesty? Why do you look so perplexed? How can it be? No, it's impossible. The story has already begun without me? How can a tale begin to tell itself? I have never known such a thing in all my years of storytelling. And yet, it is true. Here is the Doctor, being confronted on the cliff edge by an item of his own apparel, mysteriously come alive.

DOCTOR: I don't think this can be right.

SCARF: As you have remarked on several occasions in the past, I have gone to extreme lengths to save your neck. (chuckles) And here I am again, come to save you.

DOCTOR: Well, naturally I'm grateful, but er, you've never been able to talk before.

SCARF: Have you considered that I may never had anything worthwhile to say?

DOCTOR: I see. This is fairy tale logic, isn't it, eh? Something to do with being inside the Skishtari Egg. It's an illusion.

SCARF: Oh, you'd better hope it's not, since I'm about to hoist you to safety.

STORYTELLER: And so the Doctor takes a deep breath and trusts his weight to the animated garment. He lets go of the wall and starts to heave himself up the striated bands of mustard, sage, aubergine and rust, gradually working his way back to the ledge and, at last

DOCTOR: Oof! I really don't know how to thank you.

SCARF: How about with an embrace, for old time's sake?

STORYTELLER: Suddenly the serpentine scarf is upon him, looping itself in festoons about his neck and shoulders.

DOCTOR: Thank you, but it's a little warm here.

SCARF: Remember, Doctor, wherever you go, whatever you do, I'm always looking over your shoulder. (hiss)

DOCTOR: Very reassuring, I'm sure.

STORYTELLER: Then the creature gives a kind of shiver, and loosens its grip on the Doctor at once. It uncoils and swishes away, back into the darkness. The Doctor stares after it sadly.

DOCTOR: Ah, the treachery of knitwear. Who was it who said, to betray you must first belong? That chap knew what he was talking about.

(Kim Philby, long-running Russian double agent, 1912-1988)

DOCTOR: Now then, where have those two got to, hmm?

STORYTELLER: But his friends are nowhere to be seen, having already moved on ahead, through the narrowing tunnels into a new system of caves. They wander blindly, almost at random, bereft at the loss of the Doctor. As they travel, the child tries to cheer the housekeeper by pointing out the many wonders that they pass. In a room lit by burning braziers they see an immense collection of sleeping butterflies, whose gorgeous wings ruffle and twitch as they dream about the sky above ground.

ALADDIN: Aren't they beautiful?

WIBBSEY: I don't like insects. Shh. Did you hear that? There's someone in here with us.

ALADDIN: Can it be the Doctor?

WIBBSEY: He fell, Aladdin. Even in this magical place, I don't think we'll see him again.

STORYTELLER: Just then, the figure of a man steps into the full light of the flickering torches.

MAGICIAN: I'm sorry to hear of the Doctor's demise. This makes your job much harder, Mrs Wibbsey

WIBBSEY: Who the devil are you?

ALADDIN: It's him. The Magician. The one who pushed me down here.

MAGICIAN: Ah, my erstwhile minion. As you see, I have found my own way into this labyrinth of wonders.

WIBBSEY: You ought to be reported to someone, sending children down caves to do your dirty work.

MAGICIAN: That is the way it is written.

WIBBSEY: Written? Where?

MAGICIAN: Why, in the story. We are all part of the story.

WIBBSEY: I'm not. I'm just trying to get out of here. So if you don't mind, we'll bid you good day and be on our way.

MAGICIAN: I bring a warning for both you and the Doctor.

WIBBSEY: Well, you'll have to make do with just me, I'm afraid. The Doctor's gone.

ALADDIN: Don't trust him, madam.

MAGICIAN: Be quiet, boy. Aladdin's very fond of me in his own way, aren't you.

ALADDIN: You said you were my uncle. You said you were going to care for me.

MAGICIAN: But I *do* care for you.

WIBBSEY: Lovely way of showing it. Come on, then. What's this warning you've got for me?

MAGICIAN: It's about the Egg.

ALADDIN: What Egg?

MAGICIAN: Have you not noticed, Master Aladdin? Have you never looked at the night sky and seen the way the stars seem to be trapped under a gentle curve? We are all inside the shell, and the whole world is an Egg.

WIBBSEY: Yes, well, the Doctor suspected as much. He also said there were worlds within worlds.

MAGICIAN: I believe he was right. I too seek an escape route. That is why I sent Aladdin on his mission to find the magic lamp. Only the lamp can set us free. So, now we must all work together.

ALADDIN: Why should we believe what *you* say?

MAGICIAN: Because I am not your enemy. We are all in this together, all on the same side. Some of us fell here, some of us were pushed, rather roughly.

WIBBSEY: So you're saying if we find this lamp thing

MAGICIAN: We will have found a way to control each and every one of those worlds within worlds. Find the lamp, and we shall find our future.

ALADDIN: So, you want to work together, as a team?

MAGICIAN: May I join you?

WIBBSEY: First things first. I've been thinking. Either I'm a budgie's cousin, or you're Boolin.

ALADDIN: Who is Boolin?

MAGICIAN: Er, no one we need to think about down here, Aladdin. Here, we have new roles and new adventures to play out.

WIBBSEY: Oh, well, if you *can* really do magic, then you might come in useful. I'm not convinced, mind. Come on. We'd better press on.

STORYTELLER: O good King, Mrs Wibbsey is as alert as ever. She has recognised the unmagical man beneath the Magician's disguise, and she and he and the boy progress through the caverns. What's that, your Majesty? Yes, perhaps the gloom of those deep chambers is infecting our own mood tonight. It certainly does seem darker than usual in here, as if there were a pall over the whole palace. The sky beyond your balcony has grown dark earlier than usual. I wonder why? It is almost as if the stars were falling down. We need further diversion, Majesty. I will continue with my tale. What can the Doctor do but resume his quest for lamp at the heart of these caves? He sets his magical divining device to find the treasure, hoping that this in turn will bring about a reunion with his friends. But as soon as he sets off on his way, he is faced by an immense creature of land and water.

DOCTOR: Poop, poop, Mister Toad. You're not going to let me pass, are you.

TOAD: Why should I? What have you ever done for me?

DOCTOR: Why, absolutely nothing, but then, I don't believe we've had the pleasure.

TOAD: I used to be a human being. I used to have my own kitchen, you know. I was Queen of the whole house.

DOCTOR: Until someone threw you down here. Yes, it's a common story. I've heard it several times today.

TOAD: Oh, I'm wasting away down here. All I eat are them scarab beetles, and they give me awful gyp. (hiccups) I was a very good cook, you know.

DOCTOR: I'm sure you were. You don't happen to have seen a young boy, and a housekeeper, very thin, with a kind of disapproving expression.

TOAD: I might have. I expect you mean the boy Andrew, don't you, who the Rector took in.

DOCTOR: Do I?

TOAD: Oh, I don't forget. Some do, you see, but I don't. He lured me down here, the little blighter. Shoved me into that magic Egg of his.

DOCTOR: Boys will be boys.

TOAD: Well, if I see him, I'll eat him all up! You tell him that, Doctor. He's got it coming, and that snooty housekeeper as well. (hic) Oh, I'm starving down here.

DOCTOR: I'll let them know you're looking for them.

TOAD: I'm not fooled, you see. The rest of them, they think they're in another story, in another land, but I don't forget and I don't fall for illusions. I know where I am, and I'm not an amphibian! I'm not some horrible toad under the earth. I'm a cook! Why, I've got certificates for cleanliness.

DOCTOR: I'm very sorry, dear, but down here you really are a toad.

STORYTELLER: The Doctor inches past the raving toad, wishing that he still had his scarf so he could lasso her, perhaps, and stop her flicking that terrible black tongue around the place. But soon he was out of her reach.

DOCTOR: I'll pass on your best wishes.

TOAD: You'll never find them. Oh, there are too many chambers and corridors. It's like a honeycomb down here, (hic) but without the honey. Oh, I wish there was honey, though.

DOCTOR: (sotto) Oh, ghastly woman.

STORYTELLER: Meanwhile, Mrs Wibbsey is in a slough of despair, having come to yet another intersection, with six different tunnels branching off into the darkness. There are even more choices than the last time, and more opportunities of becoming lost forever in the subterranean maze of gold.

WIBBSEY: Oh, the trouble is any one of these ways could lead to the lamp. We don't have any idea. Here, you, can't you magic us the right way?

MAGICIAN: I'm afraid not. My magic doesn't work that way.

WIBBSEY: I bet it doesn't.

ALADDIN: Don't give up, Mrs Wibbsey. Don't cry.

WIBBSEY: I'll have you know I've not cried for forty years, young man, and I don't intend to start now.

ALADDIN: Forty years? Then you must be a very

WIBBSEY: Don't say it.

ALADDIN: Say what?
WIBBSEY: Old. I must be a very old person.
ALADDIN: I was going to say happy. If you haven't cried for so long, you must be very happy.
WIBBSEY: Oh, I see. Well, I don't know about that.
ALADDIN: Yet, I think you had sadness earlier in your life. But how do I know that?
WIBBSEY: Well, you see, I think you and I may have met before, Aladdin.
ALADDIN: I'm not sure I understand.
WIBBSEY: When they came into this land, everyone became someone else, except for me and the Doctor. It's as if we don't fit into the story easily. As if a place couldn't be found for us.
ALADDIN: But you're here. I can see you.
WIBBSEY: Yes, well, I reckon we're disrupting the story, changing it with every step we take. The Doctor's been put out of the way, but I'm still here.
ALADDIN: So who were we before we came here?
WIBBSEY: Well, your name was Andrew, and this was Mister Bewley. You both lived at the Rectory in Hexford.
MAGICIAN: Your words show much wisdom.
WIBBSEY: So I'm right.
MAGICIAN: The boy and I have a great mission to complete.
ALADDIN: You mean the mission to find the lamp? Your quest for riches?
MAGICIAN: And much more besides.

STORYTELLER: Aladdin was scared and disturbed by the Magician's words. When they paused for another rest, the boy sat thinking, alone. He was profoundly disturbed by what the adults had been discussing. Even Mrs Wibbsey believed this story about other lives elsewhere. He felt confused and lied to, and so, on an impulse, the child fled into the flickering darkness.

ALADDIN: The silver ships I see in my dreams, are they all to do with what the Magician is saying? And the death and destruction.
SCARF: It is so much more than a dream.
ALADDIN: Who's that?
SCARF: Shh. You needn't be afraid of me, little boy. I'm a friend, not a fiend.
ALADDIN: Come out and show yourself.
SCARF: Shh. I want us to have a quiet word alone, before your friends find you.
ALADDIN: First, I want to know who I'm talking to. You, you're a snake!
SCARF: Oh, and so much more.
ALADDIN: I see now. You're the gentleman's scarf.
SCARF: As I say, keep quiet, otherwise the others will come trampling in spoiling it, hmm? Now, listen to me. You are not Aladdin. Your name is Alex, and you are the heir to the Holy and Integral Robotov Empire on a world far, far from here. You and Boolin were sent to Earth to escape a great war.
ALADDIN: No. This is just another story.
SCARF: I speak the truth. You and that Magician come from further afield than you can possibly imagine. But now you're both trapped inside the very thing you were instructed to protect.
ALADDIN: The Egg. The secret Egg.
SCARF: More precisely, a Skishtari Gene Egg. The product of an advanced race of planetary ransackers. Thirteen years ago, it was planted inside your breast, until being removed at the Doctor's instruction. But his plans to make it safe have gone awry. The mental connection forged between you and the Egg have created this world of madness, this haven of revenge for all the things which distress you.
ALADDIN: I don't want revenge. I just want to go home, to my mother.
SCARF: Oh, she isn't your mother. She's just a figment of your imagination. Here is your real mother. Look.
TSARINA: Unable to support himself at just three years old. I could almost weep for pity. (Clomping of Servo robots.)
SCARF: The Tsarina, the most powerful woman in the Robotov Empire.
ALADDIN: And the Doctor sent me away from her?
SCARF: Just as the Magician took Aladdin from his mother.
ALADDIN: My head is spinning. Please, let me think.
SCARF: You don't need to think, Alex. Just listen to me.

WIBBSEY: Aladdin?
ALADDIN: It's all right. I'm all right.
WIBBSEY: Where are you?
ALADDIN: In here.

STORYTELLER: With alacrity, the snake slides off into the shadows.

WIBBSEY: Oh! Oh, there you are. There was no need to run away.
ALADDIN: Mrs Wibbsey, I've been talking to the Doctor's Scarf. It is possessed.
WIBBSEY: Well. I've heard everything now.

STORYTELLER: Meanwhile, the Doctor has paused in a gaudy corridor of priceless artworks.

DOCTOR: Now that's very peculiar. Don't you think that's most peculiar, Doctor? Yes, indeed I do. Ever so peculiar.

STORYTELLER: Examining the walls, he finds that they are insubstantial. His hand passes straight through a buttress. He hops up and down on the stone floor, testing the gravity, and noticing it give way slightly under his feet.

DOCTOR: These caves are becoming decidedly less solid. Everything's gone a bit flimsy. Perhaps whoever created this world is starting to have doubts about its reality.

STORYTELLER: Tendrils of mist rise from the paintings on the walls as he walks on, as if the very colours and substance of the place are leeching away.

DOCTOR: I don't like this one bit.

STORYTELLER: Meanwhile, Aladdin, Mrs Wibbsey and the Magician are observing the self-same phenomenon.

MAGICIAN: It's as if the world around us is starting to fade away.
WIBBSEY: Into what, though? What lies underneath?
MAGICIAN: Ask the boy here. This whole environment is his confection.
ALADDIN: Look! Look, it's here. We've found it.
WIBBSEY: What?

STORYTELLER: So concerned have they been with the sporadic fading of the walls and the breaking down of the illusion, they had all but failed to notice the object of their search lying there before them.

WIBBSEY: Oh, Lor! There it is.
MAGICIAN: What do you see?
WIBBSEY: An old brass lamp, in need of a polish. Why, what do you see?
MAGICIAN: Just the same.
ALADDIN: It's the one, isn't it? This is what you sent me here for, isn't it, Magician?
MAGICIAN: Yes. We've found it.
WIBBSEY: What are you waiting for? Pick it up, then we can leave this weird place.

STORYTELLER: Aladdin moves forward with almost ceremonial grace. He seizes the lamp in both hands.

WIBBSEY: What's happening?
MAGICIAN: I, I don't know.
(Deep rumbling.)

ALADDIN: I've got it. I've got the lamp. I can control the whole world now.
WIBBSEY: Now then, Andrew, take it easy.

STORYTELLER: A strange light has appeared in the boy's eyes. As the weird noises increase in pitch, he rubs the lamp.

ALADDIN: Genie! Genie! Come out at once! You are now at *my* bidding.

STORYTELLER: A blue fog issues forth from the narrow spout, coalescing into a billowing cloud that makes their eyes stream, and a familiar shape appears in the mist.

ALADDIN: Genie, appear. Grant me my wishes.

SCARF: Greetings.

WIBBSEY: Oh, my goodness. He was right. It's the Doctor's Scarf.

ALADDIN: You've been following us the whole time. You could have helped us.

SCARF: And so I have, in my own way. (chuckles) But only now that you have summoned me from the lamp can I serve you truly. Three wishes are yours, Aladdin. Choose carefully.

MAGICIAN: Aladdin, boy, think what you're doing. Don't speak until you're absolutely sure.

WIBBSEY: You're not serious. He can't actually have three wishes come true.

ALADDIN: I, I wish, I wish that the Doctor was still alive.

SCARF: Thy will be done, Aladdin.

(Whoosh! Footsteps approach.)

DOCTOR: Have I missed the grand uncorking?

WIBBSEY: (delighted) Oh, Doctor!

ALADDIN: I did it! I did it!

SCARF: Your first wish is granted. The return of the Doctor.

DOCTOR: Oh, pshaw. I came here under my own steam.

MAGICIAN: It is good to see you again, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Why, Mister Bewley. Now why are you dressed up as a Magician? Is this the man who shoved you down here, Aladdin?

MAGICIAN: We all have our roles to play in the tale.

ALADDIN: Mrs Wibbsey, you're crying, for the first time in forty years.

WIBBSEY: Oh, Doctor. I really thought you were a goner this time. We saw you fall.

DOCTOR: I'm sorry I frightened you. It was that woolly chap over there who rescued me. Oi, Scarf, what do you intend doing with us now, hmm?

SCARF: Aladdin has two more wishes, as in the story. Choose well, boy.

ALADDIN: I don't know. I'm not sure what to wish for, for the best.

WIBBSEY: If you're not sure, don't say anything.

ALADDIN: Perhaps I should wish us all out of here.

SCARF: Hmm. Out of where? This chamber? These caverns? This desert?

ALADDIN: I think so.

WIBBSEY: Oh.

SCARF: And what about your friends?

ALADDIN: Maybe they could go home too.

SCARF: (laughs) You all have different homes, and yours is not where you think it is.

ALADDIN: Now you are trying to trick me.

SCARF: No. But you must be more specific. Where is it that you really want to be? Do you want to leave my realm?

ALADDIN: I (pause) don't know.

SCARF: You should be warned that wishes can go terribly wrong. If you request the wrong thing, the consequences can be deadly.

DOCTOR: Oh, do stop taunting the boy. What's the matter with you? I much preferred it when you couldn't talk.

SCARF: Silence, Doctor. This is Aladdin's choice. Where do you want to be, boy? In this world, or on the outside where your friends claim to come from?

ALADDIN: I trust them. I do. I believe that another world *does* lie beyond this one.

SCARF: Ah. Will you go with them? Will you believe them when they say you belong out there as well?

ALADDIN: I don't remember where I belong.

MAGICIAN: That's because your circuits are damaged.
ALADDIN: What circuits? What are you talking about?
WIBBSEY: Don't confuse him, Mister Bewley.
ALADDIN: I don't know who I am any more.
DOCTOR: You're the same person you always were. It's still the same you underneath.
WIBBSEY: The Doctor's right. Listen to him, Alex.
DOCTOR: You've got to believe who you are inside. Faces, names, the places you're living in, all those things can be changed, but you? You don't belong here. This world is an illusion. You must wish for all of fictional worlds inside this Egg to be closed down forever. You must wish for this at once, Aladdin.
WIBBSEY: (sotto) Are you sure about this, Doctor?
DOCTOR: Yes! Closing down this farrago of illusions might return us to our starting point once more, to Hexford village. Go on, ragamuffin. Make your wish.
ALADDIN: I will. I wish for all the stories inside the Egg to be over and finished forever.
(Whooshes.)

STORYTELLER: And there, for tonight, your Majesty, we must leave our friends once more, wondering where Aladdin's wish will take them. It's a question we could all ask ourselves. In which other world do we imagine we'll be free? Your Majesty's expression grows as perplexed as that of Aladdin. You are less pleased with my tale than on previous evenings. Will you have me killed in the morning as punishment for this unresolved ending? Will I be sent into oblivion like all your previous wives? But wait. What is happening outside? I fear this may be the end of the tale for us all. Look, beyond your balcony, at your poor kingdom below. See how thick and impenetrable that darkness is. More than a mere night time. This is a darkness that will never leave us. A new dawn will never arrive. Behold, the city is disappearing in large melting chunks. The domes and towers and minarets are blanking out. Our marvellous world is expiring around us. Good night, my King. Kiss me farewell, and forgive me before we fade away forever. (whoosh!)

DOCTOR: Yes, I'm sorry about that.
STORYTELLER: Who are you?
DOCTOR: I'm the Doctor. I'm inside this story you're telling.
STORYTELLER: The world turns upside down. The palace and the King fades away, and my inventions address me.
DOCTOR: The genie has to obey, you see. Aladdin has made his wish, and the genie must put an end to this story. To the whole world. Your world, Scheherazade.
STORYTELLER: I, I can't see you any more.
DOCTOR: Good night, you clever girl. Thank you for all the adventures.

(Thunder in the distance.)
WIBBSEY: Who are you talking to?
DOCTOR: I don't know!
WIBBSEY: Oh, everything's starting to collapse.
ALADDIN: Have I done the right thing, Doctor?
MAGICIAN: It's getting darker.
WIBBSEY: Here, look, your scarf's gone all limp. It doesn't seem to be possessed any more.
DOCTOR: The genie must have gone back inside the lamp. It knew that Aladdin's wish would endanger this environment. Bring the lamp with you, Wibbs.
WIBBSEY: I've got it. But hang on. Aladdin only made *two* wishes. The genie said he had three.
DOCTOR: All in good time. First it's time to depart.
MAGICIAN: But how, Doctor? How do we depart?
ALADDIN: Perhaps we will fade away as well, with all the treasure and jewels.
DOCTOR: I don't think so. Everybody hold hands.
WIBBSEY: Oh, I'm feeling a bit dizzy now, Doctor.
DOCTOR: That's hardly surprising. We're passing from world to world and beyond.
WIBBSEY: This is worse than that wormhole thing!
(Cracking of reality. They all scream. Whooshes.)

(That owl's still hooting.)

WIBBSEY: Oh! Oh. Oh, I do feel odd. Oh, where are we now?

DOCTOR: Back in Hexford, Wibbs.

BOOLIN: Is this where we came from?

ALEX: Is it still 1861?

DOCTOR: Yes, and yes. I'm please to see you're both dressed in your old clothes again. Arabian Nights on the village green would never have done.

ALEX: What about the Egg?

DOCTOR: Ah yes, the Egg. It looks so innocuous, doesn't it? Just like a mere trinket.

WIBBSEY: To think we were inside there. What're you doing to do with it, Doctor?

DOCTOR: I'll tell you when we meet back here this afternoon. Now listen, I have some business to attend to, and you three must occupy yourselves until I return. Go and see the Rector, and Jake and Sally, but don't get into any more trouble.

DOCTOR: That's it, Boolin, keep digging. We need a nice big hole. So, what have you three been up to?

BOOLIN: We called in on the Rector. He's recovering from the events of two nights ago. He doesn't seem to realise he spent two days as a magical creature.

WIBBSEY: The cook's back as well, and all the other lost souls swallowed by that Egg.

ALEX: The villagers captured the dragon as you told them to, sir. They kept it in the stables until it vanished into thin air this morning.

DOCTOR: Good, good. That's another story at an end. And now they'll rename the pub in its honour. Clever how history works, isn't it, Wibbs?

WIBBSEY: Ingenious. Are you sure burying that thing is going to be enough, Doctor? To keep it out of mischief, I mean. Can't you just destroy it?

DOCTOR: Destroy it? This is a Skishtari Gene bank, Mrs Wibbsey, not an Easter egg. Each one is armed with a self-defence capability. If so much as a hairline crack appears on its surface before the embryo is ready to hatch, the Egg will explode, projecting Skishtari gene seeds for miles. It's creators thought of everything, Wibbs. That's how they became world conquerors. All right, Boolin, you can stop digging now. That should be quite big enough.

BOOLIN: (exhausted) Oh, thank you, Doctor. When we left the caves, Mrs Wibbsey was holding the lamp, yet when we arrived in Hexford, she had the Egg in her arms.

DOCTOR: Worlds within worlds, Mister Bewley. The lamp was just a metaphor, a symbol of the Egg's power inside itself.

ALEX: And the genie?

DOCTOR: Yes, now that *is* interesting. You will have noticed, no doubt, that Mrs Wibbsey and I were the only ones not to have been changed into fictional characters inside the Egg. Time travel may have lent us some resistance to the process, but I have a sneaking suspicion that part of me was transfigured, and it took the form of the genie. That's why it inhabited my scarf. I was trying to tell myself something. Simple as that.

WIBBSEY: Thanks to the genie, we all got out of there. Oh, seems like you saved the day again, Doctor.

ALEX: But sir, how will burying the Egg prevent the Skishtari embryo from hatching?

DOCTOR: You can stop calling me sir now. You're not Aladdin any more. You're Alex again. To answer your question. I'm burying it in a very special place. A man called Hammond will be along here in the morning.

BOOLIN: The local builder?

DOCTOR: That's right. I've drawn up the plans for him and told him where to get certain special materials from. Mister Motson the solicitor is handling the land sale. Do you recognise this spot, Mrs Wibbsey?

WIBBSEY: Of course I do. You're a clever old thing.

DOCTOR: (laughs) Now, before we put the Egg in its nest, let's not forget that Aladdin still has one final wish to make.

BOOLIN: Will it work here?

DOCTOR: I think so.

ALEX: What shall I ask it to do?

DOCTOR: Command it to send us all forward to the day Mrs Wibbsey and I were first kidnapped by the Robotov guards. But before it does anything, I just need five minutes grace. Long enough to bury the Egg and cover the ground, and to lay this tale to rest.

WIBBSEY: Here we are, then. A nice tray of tea and some mince pies.
DOCTOR: Mrs Wibbsey, they're Robotovs, remember. Nil by mouth.
WIBBSEY: Oh. Oh, silly me. Oh, I'm so sorry.
BOOLIN: Please, don't worry.
DOCTOR: This must be one of the longest Christmas days ever, eh, Wibbs?
WIBBSEY: Oh, I'll say. Oh, by the way, Deirdre wotsit reckons poor Mister Yates has been kept in hospital overnight after his bang on the head. We'll have to go and visit him later.
ALEX: Is time travel always like that? Watching thousands of nights and days pass in a blur?
DOCTOR: Not always. The powers of the Egg simply chose to roll us forward in time. Mrs Wibbsey and I usually take a more direct route. I'll give you a demonstration when I take you home.
BOOLIN: Home? To the Robotov Empire?
ALEX: I would rather stay here. The Earth is so familiar to me now.
BOOLIN: All will be well, Alex. I'm here. My job is to look after you.
DOCTOR: As heir to the Empire, you must return. Come along.
WIBBSEY: You, you're taking them now?
DOCTOR: I think it's best, don't you?
BOOLIN: Before we start to feel comfortable here, you mean.
ALEX: Goodbye, Mrs Wibbsey.
WIBBSEY: Oh. Oh, it's come around so soon. Doctor, shall I come with you?
DOCTOR: No, Wibbs. You stay here.
WIBBSEY: Are you sure?
DOCTOR: Quite sure. I don't know when I'll be back. Come along, you two.
WIBBSEY: When you'll be back? But

ALEX: A blue box? Is this more magic, sir?
DOCTOR: Of a sort.
(Opens Tardis door.)
BOOLIN: But what is it?
DOCTOR: It's your ride home, back to your own story, Boolin. Come inside.
WIBBSEY: But Doctor.
DOCTOR: What is it, Mrs Wibbsey?
WIBBSEY: Well, how long are you going to be away?
DOCTOR: Don't be clingy, old thing. I have business to attend to elsewhere. Lots of business.
WIBBSEY: Oh, I see. You mean, not on Earth.
DOCTOR: All over the place. Do look after Nest Cottage, won't you?
WIBBSEY: Well, of course.
ALEX: Goodbye, Mrs Wibbsey.
DOCTOR: That Egg is not the only precious thing hidden away in this house of mine. I'm trusting you to keep guard.
WIBBSEY: You can always count on me, Doctor.
DOCTOR: I hope so.
BOOLIN: Farewell, Mrs Wibbsey.
(Tardis door closes.)
WIBBSEY: Oh dear. Er, yes. Goodbye.
(The Tardis dematerialises.)
WIBBSEY: Well, I suppose I'd better do some washing up.